

**Testimony of Christelle Aube
Executive Director, South Central CT Substance Abuse Council
and member of the Connecticut Prevention Network**

***H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE
THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

*February 23 2017 Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Public Hearing
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, Regional Action Council Funding*

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Senator Markley, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Subcommittee, my name is Christelle M. Aube and I am Executive Director of the South Central CT Substance Abuse Council (SCCSAC) and a member of the Connecticut Prevention Network (CPN). I am offering testimony today to strongly **oppose** the grave cuts to regional action councils that will decimate the current prevention network structure.

We urge you to protect funding for members of CPN, an association of the 13 state regional action councils (RACs) connected to all 169 Connecticut communities, that provide education, training, and advocacy to reduce substance abuse and promote mental health wellness. As executive director of SCCSAC, I work collaboratively within the communities of Branford, East Haven, Guilford, Hamden, Madison, Meriden, North Haven, North Branford, and Wallingford.

There is much more to be done. The facts:

- The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner reports 357 total accidental drug intoxication deaths in 2012 in the state; by 2015, there were 729. Officials predict a total of close to 1000 in 2016 (once data is completed).
- The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner reports a projection of twice as many deaths from a heroin-fentanyl mix as the year prior.
- Heroin overdoses could get more common as “W-18” [a white powder compound of various elements, originally created to be an analgesic] makes its way to Connecticut. According to sources, “Fentanyl is up to 50 times more potent than heroin. W-18 is 100 times more potent than fentanyl and 10,000 times more potent than morphine.” Experts say that it’s just a matter of time until W-18 shows up in Connecticut.
- The expanse of social media makes it possible for unsuspecting children and youths to enter the drug culture. Social media glamorizes the use and effects of alcohol and drugs; enhances the influence of pop culture idols; gives the appearance that “everyone is doing it”; provides access to illegal substances; and even encouragement and instructions on the use of drugs (source: Atty. Francis Carino, Supervisory Assistant State’s Attorney).

How SCCSAC engages the communities it serves to drive community impact—we:

- Develop and implement local initiatives to address the opioid crisis, including community awareness dialogues. We piloted and continue to promote the Medication Drop Box program. In Meriden, approximately 260 lbs. of prescription drugs have been collected.
- Collaborate with our community-based behavioral health partners to educate communities on the opioid crisis—in 2015-2017 over 500 have participated in community forums on emerging drugs, opioid addiction, gambling, and suicide prevention.
- Provide the Statewide Tobacco Education Program (S.T.E.P.) to over 600 children in schools. This has shown to increase youth awareness of the danger of smoking and second-hand smoke.
- Conduct Youth Mental Health First Aid trainings. Over the last two years, over 20 trainings have been conducted in Meriden, Wallingford, and Madison with over 200 being trained on how to help an adolescent who is experiencing a mental health or addiction challenge or who is in crisis.
- Train large groups in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) suicide prevention program. Over 2,500 people have been trained on how to identify potential suicidal behavior, persuade the person to get help, and refer to appropriate services. The need for this is ever-increasing.
- Conduct the B.A.B.E.S. (Beginning Awareness Basic Education Studies) program in 2017 for over 600 children in 31 first grades in Meriden and Wallingford on good decision-making, self-esteem building, and coping skills. Pre- and post- testing shows a heightened awareness of the importance of these

skills. B.A.B.E.S. is a proven training program to set the stage for life skill development. We provide the program in elementary schools every year and have been since 2000.

- Conduct Congregation/Community Assistance Programs throughout the state. Approximately 1,000 participants have learned about the impact of emerging drugs, as well as effects of substance abuse, inhalants, gambling, and the risk of suicide. Facilitate the annual statewide CAP conference for over 100 participants, each year.
- Facilitate regional gambling awareness teams, conduct community awareness campaigns, and educate on risks to youth, adults, and seniors.
- Collaborate with communities, including youth services bureaus, boards of education, faith communities, local prevention councils, and other community agencies. Additionally, provide technical assistance, build capacity through education and information; and improve access to community resources.

This is actually the “short list” of what SCCSAC and other CPN members do every day in Connecticut.

THE BOTTOM LINE: the need for substance abuse prevention and education is greater than ever. The RACs in Connecticut provide resources, education, and information in a very cost effective way. We gain collective impact by engaging and working with all levels of the community. The Regional Action Councils link local, state, and federal substance abuse prevention and mental health promotion priorities to local and regional initiatives. We are the strategic partner in our communities that utilize our state funds to leverage and match additional funding. These dollars directly and positively impact the communities you serve, because we have been able to invest in local prevention activities. We provide community-based, inclusive, best practice initiatives.

We are asking for your support so that we can continue this vitally important work.

Thank you for your consideration.

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